

## Baird Takes Comprehensive Step to Address America's Health Care Crisis (July 24, 2007)

Washington, D.C. - Pointing to a growing concern among Americans about the country's health care crisis, Representatives Brian Baird (WA-03), Jo Ann Emerson (MO-08), Earl Blumenauer (OR-03), and Jim Cooper (TN-05) today introduced the first bipartisan, comprehensive health care reform bill in more than a decade to guarantee health coverage for all Americans.

The Healthy Americans Act, which was introduced in the Senate earlier this year by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Bob Bennett (R-UT), is a significant step to reforming health care now, rather than sitting on the sidelines until after the 2008 presidential elections.

Many Americans are just a pink slip or economic downturn away from losing not just their job, but their health insurance; this bill guarantees that won't happen," said Congressman Baird. "The U.S. is a leader in medical innovation and technology, yet access to quality and affordable health care remains out of reach for far too many. The Healthy Americans Act aims to level the playing field and guarantee affordable, high quality coverage for all Americans and their families."

The Healthy Americans Act, as introduced in the House would:

- Guarantee affordable, high quality, private health coverage for all Americans that can never be taken away, even if someone loses their job;
- Provide coverage equal to that of Members of Congress;
- Give incentives for individuals and insurers to focus on prevention, wellness, and disease management;
- Require new studies and education on the comparative effectiveness of health care items to help ensure quality care at a good value; and,
- Streamline reporting procedures and paperwork.

"We must have a debate in this country about how we are going to solve the health care crisis. Uninsured Americans are left out in a system that should be designed for fairness and maximum efficiency. We have to change the mindset that it's OK that there are haves and have-nots when it comes to health care insurance. Under this bipartisan proposal, government and the private sector will approach the problem together. A federal system ought to be able to replicate the successes states have had, with the endorsement of employers, and attack this problem," said Representative Jo Ann Emerson.

By giving individuals a choice of health care plans and tax incentives, every American will be able to afford high-quality, private health insurance that is comparable to, or in some instances better, than what Members of Congress have. The bill protects consumers from discrimination based on health status, genetics, or age, and would allow health care plans to use financial incentives to reward beneficiaries who enroll in wellness programs, or pursue healthy lifestyles.

“Americans cannot afford to wait any longer to fix health care, and my colleagues and I weren’t elected to Congress to avoid tackling big issues for decade after decade,” said Senator Wyden. “Today, thanks to the leadership of Representatives Baird, Emerson, Blumenauer and Cooper, the Healthy Americans Act becomes the first bipartisan and bicameral comprehensive health care reform legislation in over thirteen years. It is now within our reach -- this Congress -- to create a universal health care system where every American is guaranteed quality health care at least as good as what every Member of Congress currently receives.”

“The time has come to fix the health care system and the Healthy Americans Act makes way for comprehensive reforms that would offer all Americans affordable insurance,” said Congressman Blumenauer. “I am committed to working with my colleagues to ensure our tax code reflects our health care priorities. This is a good start and I am proud to cosponsor a bill that takes our country’s health care policy in a new direction.”

Under the program, individuals will choose from a variety of plans offered in their state. State-based Health Help Agencies will guide individuals through the enrollment process by providing unbiased information about each health care plan to empower individuals, rather than employers, to pick the plan that best meets their needs and those of their families. For the first four years of the new system, employers who currently provide employee health insurance benefits would be required to convert their health care premiums into higher wages that employees that would then use to buy their own insurance plans.

“Americans deserve an affordable, reliable, and efficient health care system,” said Congressman Cooper. “The Healthy Americans Act provides workers a raise, guarantees everyone a choice of affordable health plans, and relieves businesses of the crushing burden of health care costs. I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this legislation. Providing comprehensive health care to all Americans is one of the most important things Congress can do.”

The Healthy Americans Act is about personal responsibility and puts the individual Americans in charge of their health care options, rather than relying on employers to make decisions for them. The Healthy Americans Act promises access to affordable, quality health care for each and every American.

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